

Tara Mokhtari

Poetry

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About Tara Mokhtari

Dr. Tara Mokhtari is a Persian poet, born in Canberra, residing in New York City. Poetry is deeply ingrained in Persian culture and in the spirit of Persian people, and Mokhtari's mother, Pari Azarmvand Mokhtari, is a world expert in Hafez. Mokhtari wrote her first poem at age 13, and a few years later, upon pausing to take a breath between the first two stanzas of Stevie Smith's poem 'Black March,' Mokhtari made the conscious decision (which was likely made in and by the universe much earlier) that poetry was her life's work. As a postgraduate student at RMIT University for both her PhD and Masters creative projects, Mokhtari wrote verse novels, which accompanied critical dissertations on modern poetry and poetics. Stevie Smith remained at the center of Mokhtari's research during these years.

While poetry is her most enduring love, Mokhtari writes across the creative media. She was a founder and the in-house playwright of Canberra theatre company, The Nineteenth Hole (est. 2001), and was commissioned to write a play for Canberra's preeminent independent company, Free Rain, when she was just 18. These plays earned multiple awards and nominations. Mokhtari went on to write for screen on assignment, most recently writing an original sci-fi feature film for Crick Films (Canberra) and a feature adaptation of a New York Times best-selling book for Barry Navidi (London/Los Angeles).

Mokhtari's first collection of poetry, 'Anxiety Soup', was published in Australia by Finlay Lloyd Press (2013). The poems are connected thematically as snippets of daily life that shift the existential core of the speaker in some way. Mokhtari's co-edited book of essays, 'Testimony, Witness, Authority: The Politics and Poetics of Experience', was published in 2013 by Cambridge Scholars Publishing. In 2012 and 2011, Mokhtari edited the English translations of two books by Dr. Hashem Rajabzadeh (Rikkyo University, Japan) who is a recipient of The Order of the Sacred Treasure in Japan for his lifelong work in introducing Persian culture to Japan.

The culmination of her work – creative, scholarly, and pedagogical – is Mokhtari's book, 'The Bloomsbury Introduction to Creative Writing' (2015), which is now in its second edition and has been translated into Simplified Chinese. The book has been adopted by university programs in the US, UK, Canada, and Australia, approaches creative writing as a form of knowledge that, for the writer, is symbiotically linked to experience.

Mokhtari is part of the wonderful faculty at CUNY Bronx Community College's Communication Arts and Sciences department, and lives in Brooklyn with the world's greatest cat, Malake. Mokhtari has given guest lectures at SUNY Oswego (NY), BRIC TV (NY), Victoria University (Melbourne), This Is Not Art Festival (New Castle), and her works are published in magazines and anthologies in the US, Australia, Prague, and beyond.

Dear AG

a collection of poems
by Tara Mokhtari



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1. Summer in the East Village of Life

In the summer of 2013, while I finished a novel manuscript based on the famous Ginsberg poem, 'The Lion For Real', I found myself living next door to Allen Ginsberg's ghost. Totally by chance, I had sublet an apartment in the same building, on the same floor where Kaddish was written.

What ensued was a game of existential cat and mouse: me and the ghost of Ginsberg peeking at one another from around corners, waving from across Tompkins Square Park, whispering at each other in the hot night.

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I. A Boatful Of Memory

Dear Allen Ginsberg, I'm staying in the apartment
next to your old apartment, number 14, you were
number 16, at 170 East 2nd Street beside the
Psychic up from Supper

Friends keep writing to ask have I touched your
door, and I haven't yet

Today a boat ride Memorial Day on the East River
and bay sunset with beers and wieners between
the banks Of Manhattan where you lived, of Jersey
where you were born,

By Brooklyn where your beloved old Greybeard
stood aboard a ferry and wrote about you and me,
before either of us were bees or brains or
breathing

Aboard the same ferry we've all taken, fifty or a
hundred or a hundred and fifty moonrises
between us.

Set upon this sail boat going nowhere looking up
at the blue, looking across at the murky blue and
looking out at the silver skylines morph one into
another

And the people on the other boats snap photos
while we push past captained by barmen of the
East Village where you lived and

Where I live, we tacked around the French lady
who watched Whitman in her infancy, you in
prime of life, and me now with friends at twilight,

Friends who know longing and loneliness and
love that life of sailing from one nothing to
another, tacking around, not aimless, but aimless.

The Queen of the East Village,
queen of my heart, perched on the deck,
compassion in block letters down her back

We met this young blonde Ski Bunny, the Lucien
type you'd likely adore with brown eyes, flappy
blond hair, Columbia writing graduate:

He adored QEV, and two nights earlier he was
mugged on 3rd Street between A and B, four guys
beat him up, kicked his delicate caving ribs as he
lay on the sidewalk took his passport and money,
floored at twenty-four.

He adored QEV, and she agreed to entertain him
if he'd marry me for a Green Card.

Old barfly from Vietnamese Brooklyn bar aboard
the boat bearing down on the bow

Yellowing beard a reedy bank for his Hudson
tongue licking out stories about the Woolworths
building

With its turquoise tin lid poking out from behind
the shiny '80s high rises, once the tallest in the
world for some three months

And his cane hardly helped him stand, his pocket
full of cocaine to sell, he smoked cigarettes as we
tacked around,

Held onto my arm and grumbled about having to
hold onto my arm as the sun melted into the pink
moon and we floated gentle in to dock.

II. Hangover Day

Ginsberg, in the wide open window at the
Crooked Tree cafe I shake through my chocolate
and strawberry waffle breakfast this 4pm

The rain washing St Marks trash bags piled high
along the crooked street trees

The droplets of love still as traffic at 5pm in
Midtown adorn the crude black plastic

The tyres of the M8 cross-town Avenue D bound
who melted on the tarmac yesterday solidify
today in the early summer storm

Persistent steam pulls up out of my oversized cup
of coffee in competition with its liquid sister
pouring downwards outside.

The sleeping pills still press against my forehead

My eyes sag downward no matter how I try,
everything but the steam is downwards bound

And my pulse just flutters there beneath my skull
in time with the electronic Middle Eastern song

Which emanates from something somewhere
above me and fills the room and the staff speak in
Spanish together, and my knees feel cold

It's hard to stay too sad in a neighbourhood where
somebody mumbles 'Beautiful,' or, 'God bless
you,' on every block as you walk by engaged only
by the task

Of staying under umbrella and awake and alive
for just long enough to write the next chapter.

After facing the rain and the streets again up to
Broadway where I stop in to buy the perfume my
mother wore when I was a child, I slow my pace
home to

Our apartment on 2nd Street where I will really
take a good hard look at myself, asking questions
en route of the tombstones at the City Marble
Cemetery

With the squirrels paying tribute from above and
the pigeons pecking at the overgrown weeds for
worms

Why do I keep sabotaging myself, number 96?
Why don't I want things I can have, number 95?
Will I always be this way, number 94?

They don't even look at me through the bars, they
just lay still gazing up to the sky, paying steady
homage to their patrons frozen in another time
like coma patients all in a row, the stone cold
headstones.

The Pretty Californian stops in for tea and I make
it on the stovetop and the tea tastes like something
to combat constipation and we look at the packet
which reads: Detox.

She's brought me pretty purple flowers in a tin
vase which I place between us after naming them
Dragon Lady.

She leaves after a while and I'm alone again with
your ghost tapping away next door.

III. The Best Thing About Leaving the East Village Is Coming Home Again

Dear Allen, today was cold brew coffee at 9th Street Espresso on 10th Street opposite

The basketball courts at Tompkins Square Park where a guy with fresh tight cornrows

Danced gaily to the beat of the hand-ballers bouncing balls on the opposite court and young ripped men

Went shirtless up and down the fitness circuit pulling-up and pushing-down on the solid bars

I added cream and sugar to the iced coffee drank it from a straw sucking up

Words of wisdom from QEV that it's better to lose your mind amongst friends

Where you won't be raped or murdered, even if you can't go back to see them again for a week or two

Crunched sweet granules between my teeth, and walked fresh out into the heat of the afternoon

To the L train at 1st Avenue Brooklyn bound, paid \$2.75 for a one way ticket to Jefferson Street

Emerged above ground again at Pearls for Colombian beer and brought the barman a chorizo taco from the Tortilleria on Starr

(I had the salted beef, we carried them across on
paper plates dripping hot sauce and lime along
the way)

We wondered what happens to a person after
they've been beaten down by a romance and they
can't get up off the ground for a decade or two

What happens to a person who's been trapped
and tortured in love and lived never to do it all
again

What happens to a person when they begin to find
out they won't be like the others with lovers in
houses and suburbs

When the wide open door is always the highest
purpose like some singular schmaltzy Samadhi
out of the constricting coupled consciousness

And anxiety is an apparition of never being alone
again (a long-faced man with Pippy Longstocking
braids and throat tattoos

Kept looking over the bar like he wanted to talk
dirty nothings mouthed from his eyeballs
gleaming curious or hopeful horny

his girlfriend who owns the place ushered him
away, they cycled off on matching low-riders.)

Back on the L train and under the tunnel our ears
popped and popped again until

Manhattan, we walked and talked more about
What Happens When up to 11th Street Bar where
Guitar Sam jammed

We order grilled cheese sandwiches crisps and
stouts

Sit with an old man who fixes up seven
neighbourhood bars when they break and let the
loose jam delight us for a set or so

GS said hello in the break with a torn chest muscle
we made shochu hole-in-the wall plans for
tomorrow before I hustled myself out and
homewards—

Meandering back up the stairs in our building I
can't imagine the tiles on the landings were ever
uncracked and new,

But I suppose they must have been. Perhaps they
were for you?

IV. I Just Missed You

Dear One, The plaque on our building says you
died in 1997 the same year I wanted to die

For almost the first time, before I knew your name
and before I knew my name

You wrote your last poem the same year I wrote
my first poem something about the 'child inside is
dying'

I was not knowing what I was really saying just as
you were finally sure and ready.

Did you take your last walk down 2nd Avenue for
the Ukrainian mushroom soup?

Did you stroll up the punk piercing and tattoo
shops on St Marks and buy an oversized umbrella
in an improvised downpour so you wouldn't have
to

Rush home before making it all the way up to
Washington Square Park where you'd marched
against Moloch more than once

Sit down on a bench as the rain let up and hold
Orlovski's hand or someone else's hand or look at
your own hands or hold a paper cup of hot coffee?

Did you keep your beard long long after
Memorial day when the clammy heat set into the
city and began saturating all the apertures of all
the city's denizen organisms?

Did your beard curl and frizz and stick to your
neck and interrupt your meditations? Did you
write to Louis after he was dead?

Did you still eat hot soup in the summer or did
Cafe Orlin make cold green gazpacho back then
too?

If they did could you stand the NYU bunnies
waxing bumptious at the outdoor tables, oil and
vinegar on the side, arugula, kale, and a
camomile tea?

GS told me the first time we met that he saw you
around the neighbourhood in Little Ukraine,

Tonight we went back to the same hole-in-the-wall
Shochu place where we went after that night last
June, sixteen years after your last night,

I wore a dress and sneakers and my hair curled
and frizzed in the clammy heat that set into the
city, saturating my calm then inflaming it

GS's heart lining was inflamed, they didn't catch it
at Beth Israel, I told him an inflamed heart lining is
romantic

He wrote his name in Sharpie red Katakana on the
unfinished bottle of Kappa and I came home to

Ask you the afore-posed queries– please reply at
your leisure. I'm not going anywhere.

V. Midnight Aquatic Drama With Heroes

It's 2.44am as I write to you awoken by gaggle of
girls flummoxed on the landing outside our doors

Thirteen's ceiling caved a burst pipe surged a
great cascade into her lagoonish living room

When Fire Department came with great axes and
purposeful looks I looked down to see my
nightgown was inside-out

Looked up to see the young upstairs neighbour
was prepared with her crimson lipstick and
matching kimono floating down the stairs

Old lady in Thirteen started to wail, I'm scared!
And inside the apartment I spied one of the
handsome ones poking his giant pole up

Into the humble hole above her fertile galley the
last of the flood gushed out like it was spent and
finally came the quiet.

A few hours earlier in Tompkins Square Park,
probably just as the pressured pipe was about to
give out,

A choir led the poets in a reading of Howl on a
stage where the banner's 'o' is your stencilled
mug

Launching a festival of you, I wonder what you
think of that as I power down for respite despite
the residual hallway clamour ringing in my mind.

VI. Is Love For Us, Too?

Can I write VI in the time it takes QEV to ride
Feathers across the Williamsburg Bridge?

V was short. I almost didn't write it because the jet
lag was dragging me bed-wards through the heat
of the night

Even though I just lay awake and dreamless
listening to the ceiling fan, listening to the flood
tide in next door

Listening to the slowing of my pulse, listening to
the pillow crunch at my neck if I stirred

Listening to your tap tap tapping at the
typewriter's ghost through the skeletal walls and
through time which are all that separate us aside

From the ocean between your loud genius and my
hushed tedium, listening to the damage I do to
myself and turning the volume up:

Tonight at Frank's Grey wore his new wedding
band and a tan from the honeymoon in Mexico

I knew things would never be the same when he
didn't come around the bar to greet me like he
used to,

His new wife tall and brawny with a pecking nose
and deep-set eyes red-rimmed, an athlete (she
could kill me if she wanted)

I watched Grey's broad brown fingers crush a
candied cherry in the bottom of a glass with a
pestle

And remembered how I used to be a candied
cherry and how he used to crush me, unabashed,

His new wife is probably pregnant already;
they're people who take the kind of vows which
render

Even the naughtiest of fiancés abundantly
amorous if only for a year or two, and by then I'll
be somebody else.

QEV is riding late. I want to eat molten chocolate
cake and cream with her and let her dreadlocks
envelope me until I'm myself again.

Tompkins Square Park is lined with portraits of
you, one of which showed your misty warm eyes
frantic for affection

Behind thick specs searching for true love and I
wondered if you knew how fully you found it

And how that gives me a modicum of hope
amongst the madness of my mind.

VII. At Least We Have The Fans

Dear AG, now I walk through the East Village
thinking of the things I'll write to you.

The Howl Festival wrapped up tonight at
Tompkins with me in the back row in front of the
grassy knoll dwellers,

I look upon them in their ignorant bliss of all the
piss and drug paraphernalia forming a carpet in
the dark after the park closes

Wondering if they're locals or if they subwaved
down from Hoboken for this: your angel headed
hipsters have a circus now.

I met the DJ who I left in a yellow cab on Broadway
and 79th street

Two years ago saying we shouldn't act like lovers,
and at Crocodile where I can't remain wholly
clothed ever

We acted like lovers after he told me about his
starfish other and I tried to listen helpfully. He
pulled me up and framed me

And waltzed me around the concrete
underground and dipped me like a strawberry in
fondue while nobody bothered to watch

He grazed my lip with his fingertips like he did in
the thundering rain on the Upper East Side at 4am
the first time we met

And I got wet as a hundred yellow cabs sped by
on the street. He adored me and I dutifully walked
him up to 3rd Avenue to send him on his way.

Today I thought how you must have walked by
these old digs of yours right by my flooded
neighbour, old Mary.

I thought how you must have walked by
remembering how you wrote for Naomi upstairs,
perhaps you wondered who'd write what up here
in the future.

Surely there's only one good work for every floor
of every building in New York City,

And for 170 2nd Street, Kaddish was surely it, so
perhaps I should quit writing you right now.

VIII. Birthday Mathematics

Birthday boy, you were born Irwin eighty-seven
years ago today over the West river

Thirty-three years later penned Kaddish for
Naomi next door, thirty-seven years later

And I'm only sixteen years late and about to turn
thirty myself, both Geminis.

Passed some statues today on Elizabeth or was it
Mott between Chinatown and Houston

Twin lions Greek and gaunt cheeked in the
garden standing guard, I winced as QEV (freshly
hot waxed) and I walked by

Saw an owl with Libran ear peaks pointing East
and West on 3rd Street where Snow Bunny got
mugged

Walked alone in the pitch dark observed by and
observing the sinewy bronze bird rusted by
Sandy, rusted merely by being

Myself untarnished after midnight raspberries
and Hagendaas hoping for a cool change which
came when I thrust open the window by the desk

And the rain clouds rolled behind the brass bars,
around the Village, before retiring someplace
over Brooklyn.

Everyone has a peculiar walk some days. Some
flap around like they might take off, some chase
the flappers

Some are chased by invisible forces impelled to jog ad infinitum, some wear purple shirts, some defy gravity, some walk straight down into the ground.

I frump from 14th Street to Soho and back with aching heels in heavy boots at 90 degrees and stop for ice cream and fruit.

I'm carried from happy hour to happy hour in a wineglass half empty with Malbec from Gruppo on truffle oil pizza toppings.

I pop up at Frank like a mole in a arcade game and reclaim my barstool.

I don't know when you'll stop popping up, I don't know when Blake or Whitman stopped popping up for you,

If there was a pop up inhibitor I could install in the city's mainframe to stop you, I'd walk right by it.

IX. Self Preservation Is An Oxymoron

I sit naked before you and before the open barred
window in the half-light of lam

The fan turns in slow revolutions above us and the
candle in the bedroom begs to be lit

(one moment while I oblige its cupped waxy
whiteness smudging against its limits unaware of
its impermanence

wishing to fulfil itself ignorant of how each spark
to cinder evolution brings it nearer to its maker,
or knowing

It was made in the first instance to be Finished Up
like that. Self preservation is an oxymoron.)

The rain from kissing DJ goodbye when he
dragged me out onto the street to savour the
cloudburst cooled the Village

Cooled my room, cooled my belly, cooled the
community garden on Avenue B near 6th Street,
cooled the Houston and Chrystie traffic cop's
boots

Cooled everything until only my chest remained a
blazing hearth stacked high with kindling roaring
inwards

Thought about walking into East Side Ink and
having the lion on my arm adorned with words

Thought about going to Central Park to find DJ
and the illusive organic hotdog stand

Thought about becoming an illegal immigrant. I
took a nap instead and dreamt of how

They took the French lady off New York license
plates because she's in New Jersey waters.

Grey wants to see me after all, but I'm afraid of
being Finished Up, so I settled for blueberry
beer, a cheese plate,

Stalking a Great Dane through Tompkins after
dark, and a squirt of perfume on my bug-bitten
ankle instead.

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X. Escape From The Lion Trap And Running Free

A few days passed without words between us, I've neglected you in paper only, my spirit

Tormented as ever by my own misadventures.
Bought a Black Forrest at Veniero's on 11th,
walked it through the Village

And drove it to Brooklyn for the Doctor's birthday,
she drank bourbon despite her raging allergies

Long Haired Biker from Tennessee singled me out
from almost the moment we arrived, crazed wolf
in Eskimo clothing

Rode free for thirty dollars back over the bridge
looking at the Chrysler's guiding lights as my
chariot sped toward then away from them.

Showered the grime away and sang to the bath
tiles and mouldy vinyl curtain,

Tried to sing a note again in the dark in bed
almost asleep at 4am but sounded like a mouse
peeping, I heard my tiny self from outside my own
body.

Now LHB won't leave me alone, the messages rain
hard and fast and I'm a little afraid to not answer
or tell him he's got the wrong girl.

Maybe this is underestimation, maybe this is
fleeting futile freaked out filly overshooting the
mark sick and sprinting wildly west

For no reason towards nothing, possessed.
Tonight I'll wash it down with sake and vinegary
octopus with GS

I won't tell him what happened, he doesn't like to
hear about that sort of thing, and I'll walk home in
the penitent night

Breathe the air a little deeper and swing my arms
a little wider to demonstrate my vital liberty

Take the long route and put the trash out for the
Psychic next door who's terrified of the rats.

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XI. A Childhood Memory

AG, in ABC I perch at the bar thinking of the old
tree in my childhood backyard ripe with sap its
dark chocolate branches sagging over monkey
bars

I was small but strong enough to lift my soft body
up by the red metal rungs, hoist myself feet first
then knees

Until I'd slithered to the top. I'd reach for the trunk
and pick the honey molten sap bemused by the
realization that trees have blood, too

Thinking on how Band-Aids rip off fast or slow and
visited by occasional vagrant butterflies,

Some white, some black with poisonous tiger
orange centres; they're all dead now—

The butterflies, the monkey bars, even the old
tree no doubt dead and uprooted and familiar
only to my child self

Who gazed and grazed upon them in the Springs
and consequent Summers of the mid 80s when the
foliage was full

And the plums on the plum trees were full, and the
acacia bush was blushing pink and full and round

And the infinite camouflaged broad beans in the
veggie patch behind the rock garden under the
clothes line, abundant and full

And the cockatoo couple with their punk yellow
Mohawks standing at full attention, up, up, up

They fluttered up to the sizzling power lines over
the back fence, I named them Salt and Pepper,
both long dead now, too.

It was my whole world and I outlived it all, it's all
dead and gone and I'm on the other side of this
life wondering:

Will I outlive this place too? Did you?

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XII. Are We The Same?

Did you outgrow number 16 at 170? Did you
outlive the original paint on your door? It's teal
now, what was it then?

Did you outlive the mailboxes? The cracks in the
pavement beneath your window? Did you outlive
your fixtures?

Was there a tub in your kitchen? The kind with
feet? Did they wall it in? Did they plaster it up?
What was that about a sink board

And a stove for boiling broccoli? Did you see the
influx of kale arrive at the city gates? Did you give
a flying fuck about the different names for lettuce?

Did the pigeons abandon their hard little eggs on
your windowsill cooing and beating agitated
while you smoked and watched

As the bicycles and garbage trucks rolled in
unison down 2nd Street? Did you ride a bicycle?
Could you?

Did you take out the trash in the rain and greet the
big brown rats ducking for cover under the bags
and lids frightened by you, frightening you?

Did you ever think to name them: Jack, Bill, Neil,
Allen?

Did anything other than being alone frighten you?
What did you think of clowns? How much of the
East Village which was yours remains for me?

How much of you remains in the East Village
outside of my imaginations? I seem to hear your
name once a day.

Is it all of you? None of you? (...The
brrrrrrrrrrranting of the manager at the bar on
Avenue C about kegs and nitro and froth interrupt
my line of questioning like a brutal jackhammer
above the level of my thoughts, above the level of
the music, above the rain, I want to mush his
whale face like plasticine in my fist and tell him,
please kindly shush.)

I cut my hair in the sink and clogged it up this
morning. My hands look even smaller than usual
this afternoon.

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4 months later...

2. The Holiday Chill

Four months later, in a new sublet apartment in Brooklyn. I had left New York for the fall, and returned in time for the holiday season. I missed the East Village and my phantom companion, so I kept writing to him and eventually moved back to yet another place on East 2nd Street.

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I. Thanksgiving

Thanksgiving weekend from a third floor
apartment in Bedford Stuyvesant a matrix of
rectangles within rectangles

All three floors high, all three windows wide, all
painted different colours at the rear courtyard
wall:

Exposed brick, emerald, eggshell, cream, like
Christmas biscuits row after row of crispy
dwellings in Brooklyn, 16:36, the sun sets.

Grey-blue illuminates the silhouette of lonesome
winter tree skeleton between the chimneys,
amidst the dewy grey-white smoke and steam

Condensation at the window above radiator the
cape used for curtain pushed aside, darkness
within, darkening without, occasional home-lights
come on and off again

Cautious planning for layers and coats and boots
and scarf and hood before braving the frosty
street air and sidewalk of dilapidated ice-rain
puddling at the gutters on every corner

The Hasidim on route to or from Temple up and
down Bedford Avenue all the way to Williamsburg
my only company

Girls in white stockings, young women in beige
stockings each chaperoned by suitor, married
women in black on black herding children past
playgrounds.

The sky here never darkens past a purple haze,
no stars live here tonight, you could walk a block
without seeing a soul once the night sets in.

The rats are all stoned, the cat calls are croaky: I
miss Manhattan.

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II. Immortal You

You: immortalized at least thrice on silver screen
lately—once for every major scandal: Howl
obscene, murder obscene, Naomi obscene

Institutionalized each one: a court, a prison,
asylum, Columbia who now display you proudly

Films portray you proudly, galleries full of naked
you and Orlovski carrying each other

With every incarnation, Downtown becomes new
to me again and for that I'd kiss your cold
decaying feet deep in a misty Newark plot

I'd dig you out like the filmmakers and the
curators do and dedicate a decade to you. (I
suppose I already am.)

Emerged from sub-station at West 4th where you
emerged from boyhood on 8th Street:

Led by Lucien, led astray by Lucien, led to
visionary at a party on drugs, Burroughs in a
bathtub,

That first taste of wine (first thought, best thought)
dizzy amore before the French declared freedom
on the wireless

It's all half fiction 2.30 session at Landmark
Sunshine, East Houston, it's fiction or half-truths
now, nobody left to answer the difficult questions
or ask them,

You're all gone, (Lucien outlived you all—who'd
have thunk it), you're all ancient modern history

Breathing over Manhattan with every vision,
seducing fresh faced lovers with each new
version of your visionary.

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III. Christmas

Ginsberg, at dawn on Christmas morning from
Brooklyn apartment,

A shooting star or UFO between two turrets in the
darkness, smoke echoing up and sideways from
two chimneys

The Bed-Stuy wind chimes a sleigh delusion or
nightmare in a wind ripe with incensed ghosts
whooshing in through windows cracked open

Church by twenty-four hour deli with shining
cobalt cat eyes open and gazing outward in every
direction to the rows of brownstones behind
Nostrand

Who will visit me this morning, pondering, singing
out before dawn a choir with no bells, a mournful
morning organ hums a hymn, the blackness turns
slowly in reverberations

Brewing pallid heavens in blue and yellow, the
first light reflects off a tinny satellite dish, the few
denizens church-bound turn on their kitchen
lights

I watch the night-full of sleepless visions lift off the
rooftops steaming, half relieved, Viola breathing
evenly in the other room

The wind raging 'tween Halsey and Hancock, a
wild wind raging through me despite the ginger
tea set atop radiator reheating or cooling.

Watched you give interviews in 1986 after
Kerouac drank himself to sleep for the last time,

Your humble head nodding affectionate in time
with Huncke's stories although you'd heard them
all before,

(Trying, I suppose, not to be the accidental
shooting star of every television engagement;
failing miserably.)

Outside the day arrives to the bleating of first
siren dragging up Nostrand, a minor flock of
something zoom south-westwards, hard lipped,

The sky a muted glow affronting vampiric
corneas, eyelid transgressions. The wind
relentless.

Happy Christmas.

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IV. Happy New Year

Midnight hour between solar revolutions inside
arcade bar with cheap champagne and party
blower rusty trombone demonstrations on Essex

The miniskirt stilettoed cherubs totter over East
Houston bleary-eyed in post snow wind chill
somewhere below freezing in the breathless
atmosphere

The elbowers and the drink-spillers and the bar-
backs restless nudging inwards, inwards.

Last night's Hemmingways fresh against my red
nose beating steady temples the humming and
drumming backdrop to another Ball Drop

Both of us immortalized at twenty-nine, me this
revolution, you some sixty revolutions past: both
in smalls, first editions.

Went to your grave on Boxing Day and read you
Whitman, Leaves of Grass, on the grass over your
plot, my leg died beneath me

Did you hear us giggling? I did not weep for you. I
will not.

V. Return To The East Village

Back on 2nd Street now two Avenues from where I
lay sleepless zombie in the July heat with your
ghost wafting in under the teal door

The City Marble Cemetery out the window
doused in blizzard white sparkling rainbow
glimmers at the foot of every headstone

Your own headstone in North Elizabeth Ginsberg
Linsky you and Louis nestled in the snow together,
are you keeping warm enough?

The humble quiet of powdery streets insulated
post-downfall lifting three days on for eggs and
bloody maries and boots crunching ice and salted
sidewalks

The dewy impermanence of all things teeters on
the tips of damp bald branches on every waking
street

Someday soon someone will roll Moloch up in
Manhattan, a mobster in a moth eaten Persian rug,

Downtown in the inner folds of silk and dust
crawling with long-tailed rats, Harlem fringe in
tatters,

Dump the ancient scroll in the Hudson for all time,
drowned the big bosses and the little bosses

Drowned the ground in grit, drowned the
macabre waxy trash bags bursting, drowned the
payment plans, drowned the dual soul

Just a leviathan crystal lodged in the Earth's core,
naked polished lithosphere reflecting cloud
formations, remembering what used to be.

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VI. Your Medical Record

Ginsberg, in the tropics 1960 did they stick you
with the needle of slow death?

Was your liver inflamed as your gaudy
imaginings and your LSD cirrhosis of the soul?

You turned thirty-seven more revolutions around
the sun from that day, your heart bore the weight
of every cigarette

Every laugh and orgasm pumped out
hypertensive happiness, the muscle memory of
love and lust and how they burst outwards to
splatter the air.

Two strokes muddled for a crisis of cranial nerve
VII: your puffy right eye magnified by spectacle,

Did Peter picture document the droop, Bells Palsy
of the universe sagging hellwards, the first sign
something wasn't right with you—

Mother died of madness, daddy, cancer, you
wrote for them both then followed them down to
Father Death Blues, to Kaddish.

Ginsberg in 1997, your Dharma heart heaven
bound, congested with love and life untreatable

Beth Israel diagnose the liver cancer inoperable,
you had plans to make.

They took you home to East 12th Street where you
chirped at the church birds over the road from
your fourth floor sitting room

Lamenting Things You'll Not Do, nostalgic for
climbing stairs, Bulgaria, visiting Louis and
Clara's graves, sweet summers with lovers,
teaching Blake

Your heart working harder than ever, handing
Huncke your money, housing drug-addled Harry,

Parley down the address book, farewell
everyone—it isn't pretty throwing up on the
phone.

You just wanted a sleep, a morphine cradle for
your cranium, skeleton chart by the bed a droll
aide memoire,

Giving all until it finally gave out, that last breath
in the warm room, gazed up at Whitman knowing

You'd join him soon.

VII. West End Bar And Dissatisfaction

Ginsberg, the dilapidated tiles in West End Bar at
Columbia now a bus boy's monorail from Cuban
kitchen to hollowed out dining room

Booths lined up, washed out, mahogany bookend
to bookend, a miniature palm or two to fill the
cavernous spaces, concealing the peeling
woodwork

Did your elbows respite on that same wounded
bar who nursed my penchant for duality, or did
they rip it out from under you and lay me down a
new one? I couldn't know.

Dumbed myself down for the twentieth time in my
beer, absconding into ruminations of you in that
back booth waxing magnificent (or dumbing
yourself down?)

Rejoined reality, dumbled myself down for the last
time with the voids once inhabited by your
bequest casting eyeballs over my parenthetical
female

Foray into dumbing down of the girl, hushed the
higher meditations for lower harmonies

Hid in palpable shadows of conception traversing
visions of imminent insipidity:

Nightshifts ad infinitum "til death do us in",
marital sciatica nicking kinetic kindness until,
paralysed, we fall on our knees in alimony—a
billion words, unpenned.

West End Bar who watched you become you,
watched my anaemic platitudes; we both left with
much work left to do.

Out there the snow makes a Narnia out of the
university grounds coating every naked tree
illuminated by goblin lampposts and fairy-lights

You, the missing lion. The chill, irreconcilable.

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VIII. Rush Hour Manhattan

Allen, dimming to twilight 2nd Avenue halogen
bulbs like waking eyes blinking open each one

The tea light candles perched on every rustic bar
and tabletop

Fluorescent fruits and flowers in each bodega
weather-sealed entrance glowing blood orange
under ultraviolet

Headlights sift through lanes downtown-bound by
industrial bins, scaffolding and netted facades,
jettisoning out to tunnels and bridges

The people peel off sidewalks, fold into diners
and restaurants where life begins beneath the first
star winking over 10th Street—oh the movement of
it all

Two blocks from your starry separation from the
astral East Village, I stop in at an Irish bar before
Little Ukraine to deliberate goodbyes.

Ghost teacher with the gold gleam in your grin,
did Peter join you in the glitter folds of eternity?

Did life begin and end in the lines of his palms or
the opening of his mouth or in his long blonde
pony?

How did he speak to you? With honey-milk or
whiskey cigar timbres? Did he grunt or purr or
whinny? Did you murmur back?

Was it gruff or slow? What is love? What is death?
Now you've all packed up and gone away, where
are those old feelings now?

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IX. Lovely Alone

Hushed, friend, at 2am this yellow night, the floury
streets passed out under blankets of blow

Snow bellows blinding neighbourhood buildings
and night stalkers,

No footprints, nor footsteps, not a soul or sound,
even the heating pipes piped down this hour.

We're alone with the wind who hoots highly in the
Marble Cemetery's bald locusts over six vaulted
Roosevelt remains,

We're alone with the whitely hollow ghosts who
sigh at the gates, numb limbed,

We're alone with our goodbyes and stomach
aches and memories of tawdry affairs of feverish
flesh and brains,

We're alone with ourselves naked, not we, but I,
alone, naked treading over floorboards from bed
to window, to and fro, I'm alone

Cool regretting the opening hiss of heating pipes
now wheezing at the ceiling and walls til the
spluttered cessation, then still again

Warm under covers where I hunch up to see your
shadow look wistfully away as though there's
something I should know, but—you begin to
wane.

I wait, hushed alone in this silent storm folding
down on Manhattan writing whited out notes to the
dead.

X. Your Friends Made You

Carlo Marx whose Moriarty elegies betrayed the
little boy lost still frightened at Cassidy's chest in
the long new night

Always spellbound in there looking outward
through sad eyes bespectacled reflecting all past
and present just as Whitman reflected the future
before you.

Not even Jack in his wood box beneath Lowell
who damned it all then died the next year could
flick the switch of your words

From worldly Dharma father to darling little one
with dreams of Dean desperate clinging to the
specialness of having been chosen by him once

Not even Jack in his wood box whom you gave to
the world zooming high across the awful continent

Who then retreated behind the curtains of Breton
mother's Catholic skirt and drank the uproar
down with whiskey on favourite chair

No longer the kicks—no longer route 66—no
longer Neal for fuel—nothing to do but bleed out
from the very core and let it be done,

And I see you saw it coming.

XI. Your Friends Dispersed

Ginsberg on the tarmac rolling, engines warming,
suits boring one another this southern hemisphere
morning,

Singapore seven-four-seven jets speedy down
and out up ahead, landing, leaving a puff of
smoke suspended in the air cartoonish

Our own jets starting upwards newly refuelled
and ready, any time now, any time now...

Reading your Reality Sandwiches to find you
yourself wrote endless notes to ghosts too, not
only to Naomi:

Dreams of Joan B after Bill popped a bullet in her
Benzedrine high brow in Mexico then took his
wings South to Africa,

Asking her for reflections on apparitions of death
and the living left behind as she faded fast, an
apparition herself,

Epitaphs to Neil who left you alone for Paradise
more than thrice, a few lines revealing the cracks
jealous of Jack who had all the Cassady a Kerouac
could take

Did he blame you for your lovers? Blame you for
making him? Were you true friends to the end?

Advice to Bill on Junky warning the words must
walk naked,

Yourself a ghost to locked up love, imploring
Allen to open the door and let love in.

Above clouds and continent with coffee I write
you to say the day you found your lion was the day
they all dispersed

And you took the world as consolation.

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4 months later, still...

3. The Downtown Spirit

Again, I left New York for the spring months, and returned for the summer of 2014. Now I live in the West Village on Cornelia Street. I walk through Greenwich Village, where Ginsberg spent much of his younger years, every day. New York is expanding for me, it's becoming me, and it's a nice feeling.

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I. Veselka For Breakfast

Blackbeard, a billion bicycles rust tied up on
streets in morning rain outside window at Veselka
where you came for barley soup

Wreath shrine adorns the Second Avenue
Ukrainian Community Centre and the Church
whose angels breathe your songs

Its black iron gates welling up this 8am with
heaven's frantic deluge as people lumber past
laminated faces of Crimea's young dead.

Umbrellas bump off umbrellas, dogs shit by shiny
hydrants, cops come in by the half-dozen for
donuts, American coffee splutters and burns, A/C
hums a Tibetan chant and dries the air inside,

Outside digits zoom by on yellow chariots
sparking off and on, gumbooted children stomp
through curb puddles to school,

The old waitress sighs, I love her.

Golden school buses full of babies, ivory trucks
full of beer and steak sauce, neon grocery lights,
old people whispering at pancakes at the next
table juggle pill bottles,

Celebrities and stars and stripes on the M8 bus
paused on the corner, jazz mural on tenement
bricks, ponchoed cyclists flying through the air,
the solstice still upon us, the bars still shut up,

The new day gains traction... and it's going to be a
long stormy summer.

II. A Meditation On You

Allen Ginsberg, equally empty, equally to be
loved, equally a coming Buddha suspended in
Samadhi and in a galaxy above,

I weather the storm in lion's den by redwood
candle light nursing suspicions of your spirit's
skulking around the West Village...

Was it your ghost who snatched the first three
letters of this lot from digital files, the same three I
left handwritten at your grave beneath the snow in
winter?

Was it your phantom who turned the word-count
to sixes? Who left a cola can with my name on it at
my doorstep? Who crushes glass outside Cornelia
Street Cafe every four in the morning

Warning me to pick up the lexis left on park
benches in Washington Square, in diner cups of
coleslaw, on the backs of bulldogs flat out on the
stoop in the small shade of city trees?

I walked home with formless Kinhin hallucinations
of your eager young ears prick-prick-pricking up
for Jack Kerouac beside Bill Burroughs on
Bleecker market wall: was it really you? Begin
again:

Counting breaths between each vision, losing
blood, arms akimbo, losing count—Begin again:

By the way, did you bury your Rimpoche?
Trungpa whose regent killed a kid? Begin again
(tonight the candle dances with the rain)...

Out there the thunders shudder, the lightning
seizes, the weeping streets, the fizzling flame,

The Zazen rhythm sighs your name.

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III. A Prayer For You

You come to me in incense smoke weaving
paisley poltergeist mumblings through the open
window, Allen,

From Minetta origins with Corso's echoe over
avenues westward roaring silent poems, burning
slowly, full-lotus still in a summer afternoon

Breeze blowing your ashes from bar to bar after
one last pint of wine with Jack whose San
Francisco grew out of Manhattan, grew out of
Massachusetts, grew along with you then burned
out.

And your old body, underground in Elizabeth who
birthed and buried you like a New Jersey
infanticidal sphinx

Underground in the parlours performing Howl on
so many amours

Underground in Denver exchanging oral
telepathies with Dean

Underground in the sky above the Village singing
hymns and littering the new world with a thousand
stories of your old life there

Underground in eternity melting into the Earth's
core, becoming the Earth, yourself: another flavor
underground

On the street baby cries, he is you.

On the bus a bell rings, it's for you.

On Hudson, tugboat rocks, moved by you.

You, you, you who comes to me in incense smoke
a paisley poltergeist inhaled daily with the air that
sustains me.

~

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